

FCC: Please Protect The Right To Heal Yourself

I am sure that by now, those with the power to legally protect access to any and all internet resources in an environment free from corporate-sponsored censorship in its many possible forms, have read many impassioned comments concerning a variety of overlapping issues: how privacy and freedom of access to information are at the very core of democracy; how permitting corporations to write the rules which define who is permitted to access what information would be a dangerous and potentially irrevocable concentration of power not only in converting knowledge to commerce, but of resting that concentration in the hands of the very few.

Those arguments, while of vital importance to all Americans, refer to overarching principles rather than to everyday practice. And it is in practice where people are most vulnerable and most powerful. So, I would like to relate a short, though very personal, experience I had concerning the free access of information on the World Wide Web.

I have been dealing with bipolar disorder for almost 60% of my life, and I am only 39 now. While I have been fortunate in many, many ways, I can tell you that there have been times where--no matter what I did, or how much effort I invested, or how much I incorporated good behaviors with good attitudes--I was in direct, immediate danger of not continuing with my life. I can distinctly remember at least 10 separate occasions where, if I had had the energy and the purposive agitation to simply move off the couch or floor, that the result of such minimal action would be that this email--and so many other things--simply would never have existed in the first place.

So what was it that allowed me, after the howling darkness quieted and danger removed, to slowly put my days, weeks, months, and life back together, to the point where I now have two Master's Degrees, a wonderful family, and the desire to contribute to the maintenance of our terrific American freedoms?

Well, it was two very basic--but irreplaceable--things: 1) my cats; 2) the ability to go on-line, whenever I needed to, at any time of day, to quickly, safely, and anonymously access information found on Web Sites like NAMI.org (The National Alliance on Mental Illness), and chat groups, news groups, and a vast array of resources to acquire vital information; to find accounts of others who have struggled with bi-polar disorder and have not only managed but thrived despite it; and to contribute to that public discourse about mental illness to foster acceptance, understanding, humanity, and, for as many people as possible, mastery of the illness for both individual and social benefit.

In other words, my friends at the FCC, the quick, safe, and anonymous access to the massive range and amount of web-based resources allowed me to put into practice one of the most fundamental, inalienable, and thus both thoroughly American yet profoundly universal rights that we ALL MUST

have: the right and ability to convert information into knowledge for the sake of empowerment, strength, and responsibility.

So the issue is very, very simple:

1) The FCC will side with a strategy that recognizes individual and social rights to initiate and execute this process, which will benefit our entire social structure in all its complexity; and thus the FCC will not permit ANY corporate control--either in the private sector or by another government agency--over the creation of rules of information access, or to allow strategies either of direct censorship, or of "soft" censorship in the drafting of ambiguous, randomly enforceable regulations that enable privileged or limited access to information, PERIOD;

or

2) The FCC will permit such types of corporate/agency-initiated control over public information access, thereby: a) further lowering our international standing among industrialized, "civilized" nations; b) severely weakening the remaining similarities between our current government and genuine democratic principles; c) crippling the ability of everyday citizens to learn about, internalize, and put into practice information/knowledge about the outside world and themselves in a timely, effective manner; and thus d) abandon, for all intents and purposes, the backbone of the project of American democracy. In other words, the FCC will be saying to the citizens of the United States that the FCC does not think that individual citizens should have the ability to take responsibility for themselves, to learn about ways to help themselves and their communities. Such capitulation to corporate/agency interests would represent a rather bizarre set of beliefs coming from an agency under the George W. Bush administration, given that administration's insistence on personal accountability, the American spirit of resilience, and educational improvement, indeed.

Look: everyone knows that capitalism was never built to create a level playing field, or to somehow guarantee the success--or even welfare--of all of its citizens. Rather, capitalism is WHY democratic principles are IRREPLACEABLE--the two, in essence, are a much larger representation of the idea of checks and balances germane to the three branches of American government. Despite what neo-cons such as Newt Gingrich would have one believe, universal freedom of access in an anonymous, safe environment is not a "privilege we cannot afford." Rather, it is an atomic part of our national identity, a cornerstone of the many things that we SHOULD be fiercely proud of as Americans, and a RIGHT that, if compromised, would exact a price so high and unpayable that none of us--not even you at the FCC who will be making these decisions for the rest of us--will ever be able to crawl out from under the debt it will forever impose.

